

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 6, 2015

Agenda Item: Farm Lease Extensions North Shore of Flathead Lake

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP requests Commission approval to extend for one year the two existing farming lease contracts on the North Shore State Park/WMA and the North Shore WMA. The two WMA properties (160 and 189 acres respectively) are on the north shore of Flathead Lake adjacent to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Area. Both properties have a long history of crop production. The North Shore State Park/WMA farming lease (89 acres) has been active over the past three years and will expire Sept. 1; the other lease (166 acres) has been leased since 2013 and expires on Dec. 31. In return for the leases, both farmers are annually providing 15 percent of their crop acres for wildlife food plots, controlling weeds, and planting grass cover on areas identified by FWP. A one-year extension will provide time for FWP to work on completing additions to the North Shore WMA, which the Commission gave FWP preliminary approval for in May. After the additions are in place, FWP will develop a farming plan for the entire property, which is likely to affect how future leases are structured.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP notified the public about the project through press releases, emails or letters to all adjoining landowners and other interested publics. FWP issued its draft environmental assessment for a 14-day public review July 6, 2015. A decision notice is pending until comments are received, reviewed, and responded to, as necessary.

Alternatives and Analysis

FWP considered the no-action alternative in the draft EA. Under no-action, FWP would not extend the lease for either property. There would be no farming on the North Shore State Park/WMA after the current growing season. This would result in the spread of noxious weeds within the property boundaries as well as to adjoining properties. The amount of spring forage for migrating waterfowl will decline, decreasing the wildlife values of the properties. The proposed action would extend the current farming leases for one year, providing continued food plots and weed control, and an opportunity for a more comprehensive management plan following proposed addition of neighboring farmlands to the WMA. Through this environmental review process, FWP did not find any significant negative impacts associated with proceeding with the proposed action.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Because of the importance of these properties to migrating waterfowl, existing crops, weed control, and the zero cash cost to the agency, FWP recommends that the Commission approve the lease extensions as proposed in the draft EA and decision notice.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve both farm lease extensions for one year on the North Shore of Flathead Lake.